

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code _____

Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

P1. Resource Name(s): Azteca Theater (Teatro Azteca)

UPDATE

***P2. Location:** *a. County: Fresno

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad: Fresno South

c. Address: 836-840 F Street, Fresno

d. Assessor's Parcel Number: 467-072-06

***P3a. Description:** The Azteca Theater has previously been evaluated on State of California survey forms prepared in 2006 by Architectural Resources Group for the City's Historic survey of Chinatown. Additionally, the theater was reevaluated in 2010 by JRP Historical Consulting LLC for the "California High Speed Train Historic Survey Report: Fresno to Bakersfield," 2011. These survey forms are attached.

The exterior of the building remains unchanged since the 2010 evaluation with the exception of new paint.

***P3b. Resource Attributes:** HP10 (Theater); HP13 (Community Center)

***P4. Resources Present:** ● Building ● Element of District



P5b Photo date: 25 March 2015

***P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:** 1948; theater opened on November 30, 1948, Gonzalez in California History 83:4, footnote 39; Metroscan

***P7. Owner and Address:**
David Owens
5521 Rogue River
Gold Hill, Oregon 97525

***P8. Recorded by:**
Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.
Historic Preservation Project
Manager, City of Fresno

***P9. Date Recorded:** 25 March 2015

***P10. Survey Type:** Intensive

***P11. Report Citation:** "Evaluation of the Azteca Theater Located at 838-840 F Street, Fresno for the Local Register of Historic Resources."

***Attachments:** ● Building, Structure and Object Report; ● Continuation Sheet ● Survey forms from 2006 and 2010

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

*NRHP Status Code: 3D, 3CS, 5S2

*Resource Name: Azteca Theater/Teatro Azteca

B3. Original Use: Movie Theater

B4. Present Use: Theater and Community Center

***B5. Architectural Style:** Late Art Deco (Art Deco Retro)

***B6. Construction History:** The building was completed in 1948 (Metroscan) and is indicated on the 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

***B7. Moved?** No

***B8. Related Features:** The Azteca Theater is one of several commercial buildings dating from the early to mid-20th century located along F Street in Fresno's Chinatown.

B9a. Architect: attributed to J.C. Johnson

B9b. Builder: Johnson and Moore Consulting Engineers

***B10. Significance: Theme:** Latino Heritage in the 20th Century

Area: Chinatown, Fresno

Period of Significance: 1948-1980 **Property Type:** theater and community hall

Applicable Criteria: A and B/1, 2 and 3; i, ii and iii

The Azteca Theater is a 15,000 sf two story masonry constructed building which faces "west" onto F Street in Fresno's Chinatown. It was constructed in 1948 by Johnson and Moore Consulting Engineers (Ryan Johnson personal interview 14 September 2015) for Gustavo A. Acosta who owned a small theater chain, including a burlesque palace on F Street called the Cal Theater. Of interest is that there were at least two other motion picture theaters on F Street during the 1940s, the Lyceum and the Rex. (Gonzalez 2006 footnote; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1948). The theater was designed by the English-born architect, J.C. Johnson, who was never credentialed as an architect in the United States. Of some interest is that the elevation drawings originally submitted to the property owner were for a more ornate Spanish Revival style building but were changed to accommodate a more modest façade (See continuation sheet).

The Azteca Theater was previously evaluated and found individually eligible for both the California Register of Historical Resources and Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources and as a contributor to a Local Register District in the City's 2006 Chinatown Historic Survey. The consultants, Architectural Resources Group (San Francisco), found the building eligible as a distinctive example of a type, thus Criterion 3/iii, the "single-screen neighborhood theater in the Art Deco style." For the Local District evaluation the Azteca was found to be a contributor under Criterion i for its "representation of the development of Fresno's Chinatown and a new phase of growth after World War II."

(see continuation sheet)

***B12. References:** Manuel G. Gonzalez, "Arturo Tirado and the Teatro Azteca..." *California History* 83:4 2006, Personal correspondence with David Owens; Personal communication with Ryan Johnson 21 January and 14 September 2015; Elevation drawings for the Azteca Theater (Johnson and Moore Consulting Engineers); Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps; Building permits on file with the City of Fresno.

***B14. Evaluator:** Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.
Historic Preservation Project Manager, Fresno

***Date of Evaluation:** 21 September 2015



(This space reserved for official comments.)

*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A. *Date: 21 September 2015 ■ Continuation

The consultants for the High Speed Rail Authority, (JRP Historical Consulting, 2011) concurred with the findings of the 2006 survey and also did not find the Azteca eligible for the National Register of Historic Resources. However neither survey included an evaluation of the building vis-a-vis its importance in the social history of Fresno's (and the San Joaquin Valley's) Latino community. Neither survey referenced the 2006 article by Manuel G. Gonzales Ph.D. in *California History*: "Arturo Tirado and the Teatro Azteca: Mexican Popular Culture in the Central San Joaquin Valley." Additionally, the architectural heritage of this simple Art Deco retro style theater deserves a deeper look.

The City of Fresno has been contracted by the California Office of Historic Preservation to prepare the National Register nomination for the Azteca as part of the state's *Latinos in Twentieth Century California* Multiple Property nomination. As the preparation of this nomination is currently in progress (September 2015) a few additional points will only be summarized at this time to support the theater's eligibility for the Local Register of Historic Resources. A fuller narrative will be fleshed out for the National Register documentation.

By the 1930s Fresno had the largest Mexican community in the San Joaquin Valley, with a resident population of 6,000 which grew to 10,000 each harvest (Gonzalez 2006:50). For this mostly poor immigrant community Spanish-language movies provided an important escape. Each weekend during the 1940s and 1950s working class Mexican families came into Fresno to attend dances, eat Chinese food and see a movie at the Azteca Theater. (The Art Deco retro façade of the theater with its stepped parapet and blade sign, "Azteca" undoubtedly connected with immigrants from Central Mexico.) The Azteca, under the management of Mexican-born Arturo Tirado, provided not only a steady source of films made during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, but was a venue for personal appearances by many of the leading actors of Mexican film: Maria Felix, Agustin Lara, Pedro Armendariz, Antonio Aguilar and Pedro Infante (Gonzalez 2006:58).

Additionally, the Azteca Theater served as a community center for the Latino community. When in March 1966 Cesar Chavez led striking farmworkers on their march from Delano to Sacramento, they stopped in Fresno, met with Mayor Floyd Hyde at City Hall and held a rally in the Azteca which featured Chavez and the striking farmworkers. This rally on Thursday, March 24th, 1966 was attended by 1000 people (*Fresno Bee The Republican* 23, 24 and 25 March 1966).

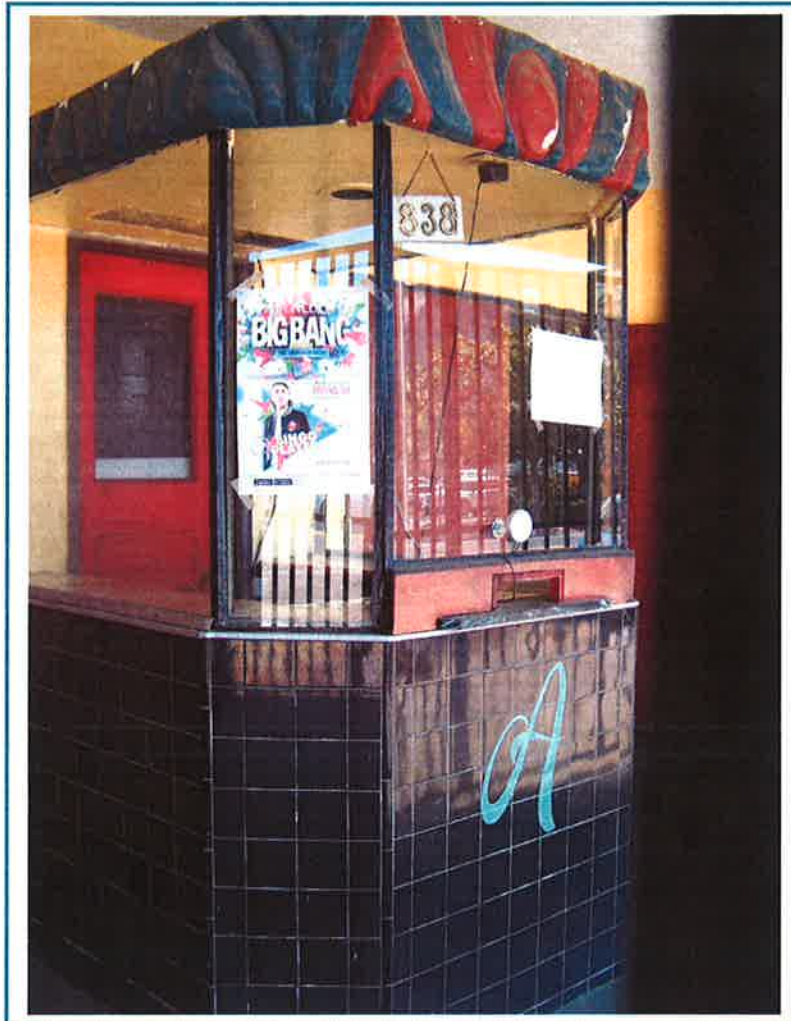
Beyond his role as an entertainer and entrepreneur, Arturo Tirado was a leading figure in Fresno's Latino community earning the unofficial title, "mayor of West Fresno." He had a weekly program on Fresno's KNEX which provided a sounding board for issues of importance to the Valley's Mexican community. Tirado's relations with City officials, in fact, helped to ensure that Chavez and marchers were protected and welcomed when they arrived in Fresno.

In brief, the Azteca Theater appears to be individually eligible to Fresno's Local Register of Historic Resources under Criterion i (for its role in West Fresno/Latino community life), for its association with Arturo Tirado, who operated the Azteca from 1956-1980 (Criterion ii); and as an example of a modest but forthright example of Art Deco retro (Criterion iii).

*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.

*Date: 18 September 2015

■ Continuation



*Ticket booth, Azteca Theater,
March 25, 2015;
Ad for Rally with Cesar Chavez,
March 23, 29166 (Fresno Bee)*

WILSON—"Ulysses," 7:11 and 11:15 p.m.
OC—"Flight of the Phoenix," 8:54 p.m.

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TOMORROW — THURS., 7 P.M.
FREE ADMISSION
to see and hear the
DELANO MARCHERS

- Talk by Cesar Chavez
- Entertainment by the Marchers (1 PM to 6 PM — Regular Spanish Movies)

ADULTS H

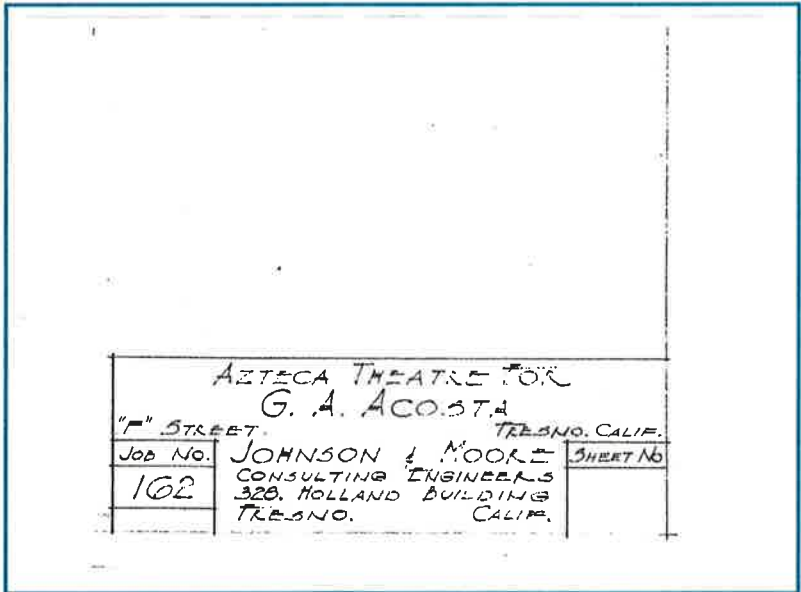
*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.

*Date: 18 September 2015

■ Continuation



Original elevation drawing and signature block for Azteca Theater, circa 1946 Johnson and Moore; courtesy of Ryan Johnson



P1. Other Identifier: 836-840 F Street

*P2 e. Other Locational Data: Assessor Parcel Number: 467-072-06

*P3a. **Description:** This property has been field checked and the building appears to be unaltered since its last recordation in 2006.

*P3b. **Resource Attributes:** HP10 - Theater

*P8. **Recorded by:** Cheryl Brookshear & David Riggs, JRP Historical Consulting, LLC, 2850 Spafford St., Davis, CA 95618

*P11. **Report Citation:** JRP Historical Consulting, LLC, "California High Speed Train Historic Property Survey Report: Fresno to Bakersfield Section," 2011.

*B10. **Significance:** J. Stock and L. MacDonald of Architectural Resources Group inventoried and evaluated this property in 2006 for the "Chinatown Historic Resources Survey" produced for the City of Fresno Planning and Development Department (see attached). They concluded that the property did not appear to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP); however, they concluded that it appeared eligible for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR) under Criterion 3, as well as Fresno's local register under Criteria "iii" for its distinctive characteristics as a single-screen neighborhood theater in the Art Deco style. Their evaluation also concluded that the property is eligible as a contributor to a potential historic district under Fresno Criterion "i" for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, specifically the history of Fresno's Chinatown. After review of the previous recordation and current field check, the present evaluation concurs with the 2006 conclusions and the integrity remains intact.

This property has been evaluated in accordance with Section 15064.5(a)(2)-(3) of the CEQA Guidelines, using the criteria outlined in Section 5024.1 of the California Public Resources Code. This property does not appear to meet the eligibility criteria for listing in the NRHP, but is eligible for the CRHR and local listing, and is an historical resource for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The boundary of the historical resource is its legal parcel.

*B14. **Evaluator:** Chandra Miller & Meta Bunse

*Date of Evaluation: April 2010



Photograph 1: 836-840 F Street; facing east, April 20, 2010 (P055).

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
 HRI # _____
 Trinomial _____
 NRHP Status Code **3CS**

Other Listings
 Review Code _____

Reviewer _____

Date _____

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Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 836-840 F Street

P1. Other Identifier: Azteca Theatre

P2. Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted

a. County Fresno

and (P2b and P2c or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

b. USGS 7.5' Quad Fresno South Date 1978 T _____ ; R _____ ; 1/4 of _____ 1/4 of Sec _____ ; B.M. _____

c. Address 836 F Street City Fresno Zip 93706

d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) Zone 11 ; 250573 mE/ 4068482 mN

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate)

Parcel No. 46707206

P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

This American-bond brick structure is two stories with a rectangular footprint. The flat roof with stepped parapet is topped with a series of air-conditioning units and vents. Stucco has been applied to the facade. The lower level has a deeply recessed central foyer that once served as the main theatre entrance. To the left and right of this foyer are two recessed doorways with covered transoms. The second floor has four pairs of metal divided light casements. A vertical fin "Azteca" neon sign written in stylized lettering and marquee dominate the buildings façade.

The rear (northeast) elevation has boarded large recessed doorways on the east and west ends of the first floor. The second floor has two pairs of divided light casement windows on the far east and west corners, echoing the casement windows on the front façade. The building is a good example of the Art Deco style and include typical features such as the stepped parapet, vertical sign, and vertical marquee.

Alterations have been made to the façade of this commercial structure. Most apparent are the additions of security grille work to the foyer and flanking doorways. The theatre sign has cosmetic paint damage, and the theatre marquee requires repair.

P3b. Resource Attributes: HP10 - Theater

HP6 - 1-3 story Commercial Building

Resources Present: Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5a. Photo or Drawing (Photo required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



P5b. Description of Photo:

(View, date, accession #)

View looking east, May 2005

P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:

Historic Prehistoric Both

c. 1950/ 1948 & 1950 Sanborn

P7. Owner and Address:

David Owens
838 F Street
Fresno, CA 93706

P8. Recorded by:

J. Stock & L. MacDonald
Architectural Resources Group
Pier 9, The Embarcadero
San Francisco, CA 94111

P9. Date Recorded: April 2006

P10. Survey Type (Describe)

City of Fresno Chinatown Historic
Property Survey

P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

Attachments:

None

Continuation Sheet

District Record

Rock Art Record

Other (List)

Location Map

Building, Structure, and Object Record

Linear Feature Record

Artifact Record

Sketch Map

Archaeological Record

Milling Station Record

Photograph Record

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

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NRHP Status Code 3CS

Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) 836-840 F Street

B1. Historic Name: Azteca Theatre

B2. Common Name: Azteca Theatre

B3. Original Use: Commercial Building

B4. Present Use: Commercial Building

B5. Architectural Style: Art Deco

B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

See B10. Significance.

B7. Moved? No Yes Unknown Date: _____ Original Location: _____

B8. Related Features:

B9a. Architect: _____

b. Builder: _____

B10. Significance: Theme Development of Chinatown

Area Fresno

Period of Significance 1872-1942,

Property Type movie theater

Applicable Criteria A

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

The building at 836-840 F Street was constructed c.1950 (the building does not appear on the 1948 Sanborn Map but is shown on the 1950 map). The building was constructed to house the Azteca Theater. Although the building appears to be vacant, the vertical Azteca sign still dominates the façade. While the theater and lobby occupied most of the building, there were two shops on the second floor, 836 and 840 F Street.

In the 1910s movie theaters opened throughout the country. The building form copied the legitimate theaters of past decades and often included retail or office space in addition to the movie theater functions. As movie theaters became a more established industry, the theater function became more prominent, often with elaborate projecting signs and marquees. The theater facades could be ornamented in a variety of styles, but by the 1930s, Art Deco and Period Revival styles were popular. Designs were often more elaborate than earlier theaters and incorporated the entire façade. The Azteca Theater at 836-840 F Street is an excellent example of a theater utilizing the two-part commercial block form designed in the Art Deco style. Geometric forms, stylized ornamentation, and vertical elements extending past the roofline characterized Art Deco, which was primarily applied to commercial buildings in the 1920s and 1930s, although the style was used for theaters like the Azteca into the 1950s. (See Continuation Sheet.)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: HP10 - Theater

HP6 - 1-3 story Commercial Building

B12. References:

See continuation sheet.

B13. Remarks:

J. Stock & L. MacDonald

B14. Evaluator: Architectural Resources Group

Date of Evaluation: April 2006

(This space reserved for official comments.)

